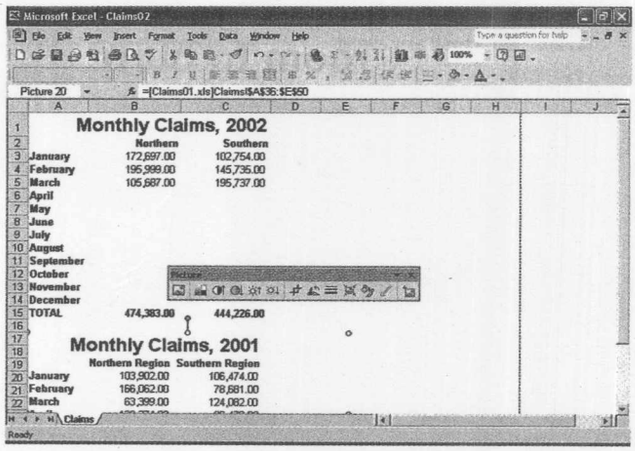
MICROSOFT EXCEL tips

BY CRAIG STINSON



GET THE PICTURE? PICTURE LINKS LET YOU CREATE A LINKED IMAGE OF A WORKSHEET RANGE. THIS IS SIMPLER THAN DIVIDING UP THE WORKSHEET INTO MULTIPLE WINDOWS AND ALSO PROVIDES A SIMPLE WAY TO PRINT SEPARATE WORKSHEET CHUNKS TOGETHER, WITHOUT A PAGE BREAK BETWEEN THEM. TO CREATE A PICTURE LINK, COPY A RANGE OF CELLS, MOVE TO WHERE YOU WANT TO PASTE THEM, AND WHILE HOLDING DOWN THE SHIFT KEY, SELECT EDIT | PASTE PICTURE LINK.

HAVE IT YOUR WAY

Microsoft Excel's Options dialog box provides nearly 100 settings, governing everything from the presence or absence of worksheet gridlines to the way empty cells in chart ranges are plotted.

But not all of these options affect program defaults. If you turn the gridline display off, for example, Excel applies your action to the current worksheet only. If you turn off Edit in Cell, on the other hand, in-cell editing is gone until you turn it back on. Confusing matters, the dialog box provides no way of distinguishing sheet-level settings from global settings. There is, however, a way to make all customizations apply to new workbooks.

Set up a workbook the way you want all new workbooks to be. Then select File | Save As, specify the file type as Template, name the file *Book*, and save it in your XLSTART folder.

A Book template can incorporate data as well as program settings. For example, if you use the same header in all of your documents, storing it in a Book template will save you the trouble of recreating it each time.

The location of the XLSTART folder depends on your operating system and Excel version. You can use the Start menu's Search or Find command to locate it. If you change your mind about a Book template customization, you can revert to factory defaults by simply removing the Book template from XLSTART .

TAKE A SHORTCUT

- **Ctrl-'** creates an exact (not relative) copy of the formula in the cell above, along with its numeric format.
- **Ctrl-"** copies the value (not formula) and the numeric format of the cell directly above the current cell.
- **Ctrl-;** inserts the current date.
- **Ctrl-Shift-:** inserts the current time.
- **Ctrl-[** selects the immediate antecedent of the current cell, or those cells referenced in the current cell's formula.
- **Ctrl-Shift-{** selects all antecedents of the current cell.
- **Ctrl-]** selects the immediate dependents of the current cell.
- **Ctrl-Shift-}** selects all dependents of the current cell.
- **Ctrl-A** offers an explanation of an argument and a description of the function. If you have trouble remembering the order and meaning of Excel's financial or statistical functions, begin entering the function you need and then press Ctrl-A. A dialog box will appear with an explanation of each argument and a description of the function itself. If you enter cell references or arithmetic expressions for an argument, the dialog box shows the argument's calculated value. After you've completed all the required arguments, the dialog box displays the result of the function, allowing you to check your work before committing it to the worksheet.

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SPEAK YOUR NATIVE TONGUE

You can use column and row headings in a table to build natural-language cell references. For example, if the intersection of the column headed *Percent* and the row headed *East* is cell C5, you can reference the value at that cell by writing =East Percent. In an arithmetic expression you can write, for example, East Percent*1.1.

You don't have to assign any names to make this work; the names are created by Excel implicitly. You do, however, have to make sure that the

Accept Labels in Formulas option is enabled in the Calculation tab of the Tools | Options dialog.

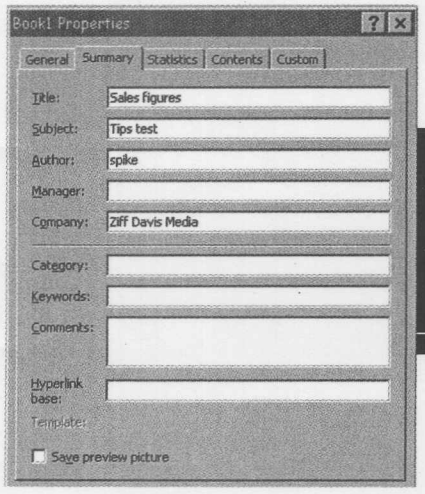
NO MORE DISCONNECTS

If you plan to use the Paste Link function to move a data range from an Excel document into a Word or PowerPoint document, you should name the range first. Then in the receiving application, reference the Excel data by its range name, not the cell coordinates.

If you rearrange your worksheet, Excel will update the name so that it still references the same data, and the link in your Word or PowerPoint document will remain valid. If you link by cell address and then rearrange the worksheet, the Word or PowerPoint document will point to the wrong set of cells.

EXPANDING CHARTS

If you're plotting historical data over time—market prices or sales figures, for example—you might want to design your chart so that you can add new figures without having to redefine the data ranges.



The simplest way to do that is to add your new data *within* the existing data ranges. If your chart plots A1:A10 and you insert a new row somewhere in this range, Excel expands the plot range to A1:A11. Insert new data and your chart is automatically in step.

If the chart uses time-series scaling, you don't even have to sort the expanded range. Excel plots time-series values in chronological order, regardless of how they appear on your worksheet.

If you don't want to insert new data into old, you can create dynamic names (names that update automatically) to the chart ranges. For example, with dates in column A and prices in column B (and headers in row 1), assign the name *Date* to the formula =OFFSET(Sheet1!$A$1,1,0,COUNTA(AA)-1) and the name *Price* to a similar formula involving column B.

As you add data to these columns, the COUNTA functions will increment accordingly, and the names will adjust to incorporate the new points. If you assign names (rather than ranges) to your chart, everything will stay in sync.

WHAT'S YOUR ANALYSIS?

If Excel's 80 statistical functions are not enough to meet all your needs, then you should check out the Analysis Toolpak add-in. This includes a number of invaluable statistics tools, including two types of ANOVA tests, Fourier analyses, histograms, and three types of *t*-tests.

But this add-in isn't enabled by default. To use it, just go to Tools | Add-ins and select Analysis ToolPak (take a look at some of the other add-ins while you're there). To use the ToolPak, select Tools | Data Analysis.

AT A GLANCE

Many users know about Excel's Quick Sum feature, which shows the sum of the selected cells down on the status bar. But most people don't know that they can also get ad hoc averages, minimum and maximum values, and counts. To have Excel display these figures, simply right-click the Quick Sum button and change the designated function.

YOU'VE CHANGED

It is often helpful to track and view who has made which modifications to a spreadsheet. You can do this by selecting Tools | Highlight Changes | Track Changes. This also allows you to share the workbook, letting multiple people access it at one time.

If you don't want to share the workbook, you should store the file in an unshared directory. You will still be able to keep tabs on the changes you've made.

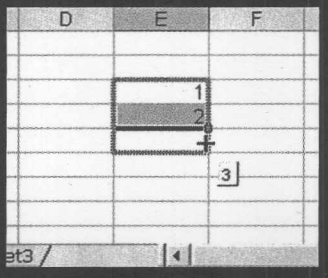
EVER-CHANGING CHARTS

By assigning names to formulas that involve the OFFSET and COUNTA functions and then using the names rather than explicit range references as your chart data, you can create charts that change over time.

For example, to create a chart that plots only the 100 most recent points in column B, assign a name to the formula =OFFSET(Sheet1!$B$1,COUNTA($B:$B)-100,0,100), and then specify the name on the Data Range line of Excel's Source Data dialog box. The OFFSET formula tells Excel to start at the 100th row from the end of the populated area of column B and create a range reference encompassing 100 rows and 1 column.

THE ART OF AUTOFILL

• If you select a single numeric cell and drag its fill handle downward or to the right, you get copies of that number. To build an ascending series, select a single number and hold down Ctrl while dragging the cell's fill handle (Excel will assume an increment value of 1). If you highlight two numeric cells and drag to fill, Excel will continue the numeric pattern. If you hold the Ctrl key while dragging to fill from a pair of cells, Excel creates copies of the two cells.



PROPERTY CLAIMS • Associating keywords and other properties with a file can make a spreadsheet much easier to find after you've lost track of it. You can force Excel to prompt for this information every time you save a file by choosing Tools | Options | General | Prompt For Workbook Properties.